

# Francey Russell

## **“How Shall We Put Ourselves in Touch with Reality?” On Baldwin, Film, and Acknowledgment**

WHAT MIGHT FILM’S CONTRIBUTION BE TO THE WORK OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT, apology, and moral repair? Can a film itself constitute a form of acknowledgment? Memorials and monuments are the more obvious candidates of art forms to study in this context, but film—perhaps the most popular form of public art, or perhaps it once was (Mitchell 1990, 889)—is one of our essential media for collectively reflecting on what we have done and for collectively picturing who we are. While a memorial is typically marked off from ordinary life—“a special precinct extruded from life, a segregated enslave” (Danto 1985, 152)—film is more continuous with our ordinary lives, and thus might be more indicative of what we are prone to avoid or willing to acknowledge.

In his 1976 book on film, *The Devil Finds Work*, James Baldwin reflects on the role that film might play in the extensive, multidimensional, public task of, as he puts it, “putting ourselves in touch with reality.” “Reality” here refers to the reality of American racism, its history and present, and Baldwin is primarily concerned with whether American films can put us in touch with that reality or whether they will remain instead at an “absolutely appalling distance” from it (58). While Baldwin focuses on films that fall into the latter category, es-

pecially films that distort and avoid the reality of American racism while purporting to face and denounce it, his text also evidences a conviction that film could be a medium for more adequate acknowledgment. So the questions are: How is it that films can avoid the reality of American racism even when they take it up as their explicit theme and content? And what would it look like for film to adequately acknowledge that reality?

Films project pictures of what racism is, not by painting or verbal description or abstract rendering, but by picturing—photographing—*us*, that is, real racialized human beings. Through its narrative and aesthetic strategies, a film constructs a specific picture or conception of the reality of racism: what racism is, how it is expressed and maintained, how it is suffered and fought. As we will see, some of these pictures function to facilitate further avoidance of reality, while other cinematic pictures constitute and enable acknowledgment. “The camera sees what you want it to see. The language of the camera is the language of our dreams” (Baldwin 1976, 35).

In this paper I discuss two kinds of cinematic pictures or conceptions of racism: (1) films that present racism as a *special event*, typically an action, that erupts within some broader world, and (2) films that present racism as a pervasive, structural *reality*, as part of the world itself. I look at two films made three years apart: I develop Baldwin’s analysis of Norman Jewison’s 1967 *In the Heat of the Night* as an example of the former, and offer my own analysis of Michael Roemer’s 1964 *Nothing But a Man* as an instance of the latter. *Nothing But a Man* is to this day not well known, though it is almost universally praised by the critics and academics who do know it, and the film was threatened at every stage of its development. The material history and life of *Nothing But a Man*—the trials of its production and release, its neglect and belated restoration—are expressive and part of the history and life of America. By contrast, *In the Heat of the Night* was widely supported and celebrated. This paper should help explain these revealingly divergent responses.

Regarding what is required for the collective acknowledgment of American racism, Thomas McCarthy writes:

Public remembrances and commemorations of the suffering of victims—through artistic as well as historical representations, in public rituals and public places, in school curricula and mass media—play crucial roles in transforming traditions and in determining what will or will not be passed on to future generations ... Recognizing past evil as integral to [our] history, as issuing “*from the very midst of our collective life*”—rather than as marginal or accidental to us—“cannot but have a powerful impact on our self-understanding” (2002, 627. quoting Habermas 2001, 45, my emphases).

My argument here is that films that picture American racism as integral to, even constitutive of, American reality are a crucial means for acknowledging racism—past or present—as issuing from the midst of collective life. I am not suggesting that (white) audiences will be morally improved by watching such movies. The films guarantee nothing. And yet their absence or obscurity suggests that our efforts to acknowledge such a reality are and will be inadequate. In a film-going society, their absence indicates that the public does not yet have an adequate shared conception of what racism actually is. In her essay on *Nothing But a Man*, Terri Francis affirms simply: “history needs a cinematic imagination” (2015, 111). This paper argues that cinematic imagination can be an important form of acknowledgment.

IN HIS 1962 ESSAY “AS MUCH TRUTH AS ONE CAN BEAR,” BALDWIN POSES THE question: “How shall we put ourselves in touch with reality?” (37). The reality with which he is specifically concerned is the reality of American racism, its history and its present (where these are not separable, since “history is literally present in all that we do” [1965, 723]). Baldwin presents this as an outstanding task because Americans—

especially, though not exclusively, white Americans—are staggeringly out of touch with this reality. As we shall see, Baldwin observes a robust national appetite for attending to racism when it is pictured as an explosive, gaudy historical spectacle, but little interest in or stomach for trying to acknowledge racism as “one of the principal facts of [America’s] life” (1961, 116), that is, as a constitutive, structural reality. So when Baldwin voices the need to put ourselves in touch with reality, he means American racism as integral to America’s reality and its sense of itself. I will not here present an argument that racism is integral to and partially constitutive of America’s social, political, and economic life, of its historical and present self-understanding. I proceed on the assumption that this is Baldwin’s conception, that it is correct, and that it still calls for adequate acknowledgment.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout his writing, Baldwin insists on the outstanding need to acknowledge and assume the burden of this entrenched reality, and on the equally entrenched practice of white avoidance. As he writes, “the fact that they [white people] have not yet been able to do this—to face their history, to change their lives—hideously menaces this country. Indeed it menaces the entire world” (1965, 722). The task of acknowledging this reality may indeed be the idea that most orients Baldwin’s work as a whole: he invokes it throughout his corpus, it is the aim he sets himself in his fiction, and it is the final standard to which he holds works of art in his criticism. While he sees mass culture as functioning primarily to facilitate avoidance (“mass culture really reflects ... the American bewilderment in the face of the world we live in. We do not seem to want to know what we are in the world” [1960, 375]), Baldwin never abandons his conviction maintains that art has the power and responsibility to disrupt such ignorance and self-ignorance, to “reveal something a little closer to the truth” (1955, 12). As he writes in “As Much Truth,” “the multiple truths about a people are revealed by that people’s artists—that is what artists are for” (1962, 37). Before turning to Baldwin’s writings on art and film, it will be helpful to first briefly elucidate this idea of acknowledgment.

In philosophical discussion on moral repair and responding to wrongdoing, the acknowledgment of wrongdoing is seen as essential to atonement, apology, and repair of any form, whether private or public, individual or collective. Linda Radzick, for instance, writes that acknowledging culpable wrongdoing is the “least controversial” requirement of atonement and apology (2004, 150). Some even treat these concepts as synonymous (see Govier 1999, 5), as when Corntassel and Holder reference Canada’s and Australia’s “official apologies/acknowledgments” (2008, 486). Without adequate acknowledgment, there can be no adequate apology. As Margaret Urban Walker writes:

an apology that arrives too soon, one that precedes full examination of the nature and magnitude of wrongdoing and appears to head off a full expression of the grief and anger of the victims, becomes an insult. It may signify a self-serving interest of those burdened with responsibility who want to cut their costs and protect their sense of decency from being challenged. (2006, 203)

Walker suggests that the posture of apology can actually be more comfortable—self-serving, self-protective—than the work of acknowledgment. Especially in cases of complex, historical, and entrenched injustice, repudiating and apologizing for the wrong may be an effort to skip over the acknowledgment in a rush to assume a position of distance and moral clarity. What is it that makes acknowledgment so challenging?

The concept of acknowledgment is as intuitively significant as it is difficult to articulate. In her paper “What Is Acknowledgment and Why Is It Important?” Trudy Govier (1999) describes a somewhat paradoxical situation: in political and academic contexts where collectives work either to address serious wrongdoing or to analyze the components of an adequate response, the concept of acknowledgment was regularly invoked as essential, and yet the subjects involved in these discussions just as often could not say what it meant. I pro-

pose that the concept of acknowledgment has four essential components: it is reflexive, it is practical, it is answerable to some reality, and its avoidance is not merely a contingent failure or lack but a posture towards which we are actively prone (and as we shall see, some more than others).

Philosophers typically limn the concept of acknowledgment by distinguishing it from theoretical knowledge, with the latter construed narrowly as an epistemic achievement, the acquisition of justified true beliefs. It is possible to know something without acknowledging it: I may know, theoretically, that you are in pain, or that I broke a promise, or that I am a woman, or that racism is integral to our history and present, but something further is required if I am to acknowledge any of this. Acknowledgment implicates me in that which I acknowledge and calls for some response; acknowledgment is thus *reflexive* and *practical* (Cavell 2002a, 257; Govier 1999, 7). To acknowledge your pain, for instance, I do not simply cognize it as a fact in the world but also recognize your pain as something that makes a claim on me, calls on me to do or reveal something (Cavell 2002a, 257). Likewise, acknowledging something about myself, for example, that I am in pain or that I am a woman, involves appreciating the object of acknowledgment—my pain or my gender—not just as a fact but also as implicating me and as part of my practical milieu, as something that makes a difference to how I understand myself and how I go on. It is likewise for the history and present of society. If I've read some history and statistics, I may know that racism is one of the principal facts of American life, but this is not yet to acknowledge it; the latter would implicate me in those realities and them in me, call for some response, and revise my understanding of self and world. Thus, acknowledgment may not be the act of a moment but the work of a lifetime.

These examples also show that there is an essentially receptive dimension to acknowledgment: acknowledgment is answerable to some extant reality (Govier 1999, 16) and is in this respect analogous to acceptance (Cavell 2002b, 324). It is important to call attention to

this, since in philosophy's rush to distinguish acknowledgment from theoretical knowledge, its receptive dimension can be underemphasized. Yet while acknowledgment apprehends, accepts, and responds to something given, this does not mean accepting something as a fixed fact to be left as is. The point is rather that acceptance of reality is a condition for responding to it. Here, for example, is how Baldwin characterizes his relationship to America's history:

It is to history that we owe our frames of references, our identities, and our aspirations. And it is with great pain and terror that one begins to realize this. In great pain and terror one begins to assess the history which has placed one where one is, and formed one's point of view.... I am speaking as a historical creation which has had bitterly to contest its history, to wrestle with it, and finally accept it, in order to bring myself out of it. (1965, 723)

What Baldwin describes here is the difference between cognizing history as a set of facts, and acknowledging history as implicating who he is and as calling for some response. Acknowledging history involves seeing oneself as implicated in and shaped by that history, where this is a condition for any effort to "bring [oneself] out of it."

Precisely because acknowledgment is reflexive, practical, receptive, and thus demanding, "some of what we know or are in a position to know, we do not acknowledge and would not be *willing* to acknowledge" (Govier 1999, 7). Insofar as acknowledgment changes one's practical circumstances, responsibilities, and understanding of self and world, it will be frequently avoided. For Cavell, the concept of avoidance is essential to the concept of acknowledgment. It is because we avoid and deny others that acknowledgment becomes necessary (1971, 123), and thus, as he puts it, "the concept of acknowledgment is evidenced equally by its failure as by its success" (2002a, 263). The reason the failure of acknowledgment is not simply a contingent case of falling short is that the avoidance of acknowledgment is active,

something one does, hence something for which one is responsible: “A ‘failure to know’ might just mean a piece of ignorance, an absence of something, a blank. A ‘failure to acknowledge’ is the presence of something, a confusion, an indifference, a callousness, an exhaustion, a coldness” (2002a, 264).

Now, Cavell tends to consider acknowledgment and avoidance as broadly human capacities and propensities, and does not typically analyze these concepts through structural or historical lenses. Baldwin’s contribution is thus to present the tendency to avoid reality, and hence the outstanding need for acknowledgment, in socio-historical and racialized terms. Specifically, he understands the tendency to avoid reality as one especially pursued by white people. For Baldwin, being white is not a natural kind (“there *are* no white people” [1984, 169]) but a social, institutional, and historical reality and achievement (see 1963, 346). It is not that there are, naturally, white people with a natural predisposition towards avoidance and self-deception. Rather, what we could call the social practice of being white, within a white supremacist society, is a practice that involves the avoidance of reality (see also Mills 1999). Baldwin sometimes describes the avoidance of reality as an avoidance of factual knowledge (“one wishes that Americans, white Americans, would read, for their own sakes, this [historical] record, and stop defending themselves against it” [1965, 722]), but he is more typically concerned with the avoidance of the reflexive, practical, and transformative dimensions of acknowledgment: “the danger in the minds of most white Americans is the loss of their identity. Any upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one’s sense of one’s own reality” (1963, 294). Avoidance is the strategy for maintaining this sense of self and world. And again, for Baldwin, what is avoided, hence what stands most in need of acknowledgment, is the reality of American racism as integral to American reality.

I have so far elaborated these concepts primarily through the lens of the individual, so how should we understand public and collective acknowledgment and avoidance? The production and main-

tenance of collective acknowledgment of the history and present of American racism involve material investment in public and collective cultural, political, and economic mechanisms. These can be explicit and directed, as in the case of criminal trials, truth commissions, reparations, memorials, and official apologies, and they can also be more integrated and continuous with ordinary life, as part of what Thomas McCarthy calls the politics of public memory and the politics of education. He writes:

Until legal, institutional, normal everyday racism is publicly and widely understood to have been integral to our history and identity as a nation, we will ... continue to encounter major obstacles for developing the degree of transracial political solidarity required for demographic solutions to the forms of racial injustice that are its continuing legacy. (2002, 641)

What Baldwin emphasizes is that collective avoidance involves no less material investment and is no less active, even if—because it is so entrenched and routine—it will typically not be so self-aware. It is, as he puts it, a “sacredly cultivated” ignorance (1971). Walker describes it as “a history of concerted and institutionally supported denial. The maintenance of this history is itself a collective work in which some construct and shore up falsehoods while others are incurious, complacent, or actively resist opportunities to know the truth” (2006, 205).

Baldwin finds evidence of this practiced avoidance in his everyday interactions and lived experience, and in the political arena, and also as it is enacted in literature, and—turning to my focus here—in film, as discussed in his 1976 book *The Devil Finds Work*.

IN *THE DEVIL FINDS WORK*, BALDWIN PRESENTS CINEMA NOT JUST AS A POPULAR art form but also as a shared, public site of collective instruction, part of our politics of education. Specifically, he describes film as a crucial site of national, racial instruction: America’s dominant racialized

self-understanding is articulated—pictured—on film. The book opens with memories from childhood, where Baldwin describes his earliest encounters with the world—or, with America—as mediated through film, and his first experiences at the movies as some of his earliest formative encounters with America’s racial reality.

Baldwin focuses on popular films that expressly focus on race and racism, including *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967), and *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972). His analyses carry forward his earlier critique of the protest novel, a genre guided by the intention to demonstrate that slavery or racism (or some other institution) is wrong. What appalls Baldwin ethically and aesthetically is that these works simplify at once the reality of American racism and the work of acknowledgment, providing the reader with a premature, self-congratulatory sense of moral accomplishment. These works provide a kind of performance of acknowledgment that functions to avoid the task, offering the more comfortable position of moral repudiation in its place (see also Frank 2014).

The “protest” novel, so far from being disturbing, is an accepted and comforting aspect of the American scene ... Whatever unsettling questions are raised are evanescent, titillating; remote, for this has nothing to do with us, it is safely ensconced in the social arena, where indeed, it has nothing to do with anyone, so that finally we receive a very definite thrill of virtue from the fact that we are reading such a book at all. (1955, 15)

Thus when Baldwin writes, as we saw, that “the multiple truths about a people are revealed by that people’s artists—that is what artists are for,” this must be understood in two ways. He is first of all proposing that it is the task of the artist to subject their society to critical examination. But Baldwin is also demanding that we read artists symptomatically, as revealing the truths of their society the way a symptom reveals an illness or a dream reveals a wish. A film can

picture and project an American wish, even in spite of its (its creator's) intentions (again: "the language of the camera is the language of our dreams" [1976, 35]). A film that expressly purports to face and condemn American racism can indeed reveal some significant truth about that reality, not because it is adequate to the task of acknowledgment but through its tactics for avoiding it.

I now turn to the central task of this paper, which is to elaborate two broad cinematic strategies: films can picture racism as a *special event* and films can picture racism as a *pervasive reality* (these two strategies are not exhaustive, and a single film can engage both). I analyze *In the Heat of the Night* as an instance of the former and *Nothing But a Man* as an instance of the latter. Following Baldwin, I will argue that the former constitutes an avoidance of reality, while the latter constitutes a kind of acknowledgment.

*In the Heat of the Night* was released in 1967; it won five Academy Awards, and spawned two sequels and a television show. The film stars Sidney Poitier—an actor Baldwin returns to again and again—as Philadelphia police detective Virgil Tibbs, who is arrested in a Mississippi train station for murder. After realizing (with incredulity) who Tibbs is and that he is innocent, local police chief and flagrant racist Gillespie (Rod Steiger) reluctantly capitulates to the idea that Tibbs should stay to help with the investigation. The film's murder plot provides the occasion for the film's real story, which is Tibbs and Gillespie's relationship and "the salvation of the Sheriff's soul" (1976, 53). Baldwin regards the film as inept and narratively and psychologically preposterous, but he is careful to note that one cannot simply dismiss it: "our situation would be far more coherent if it were possible to categorize, or dismiss, *In the Heat of the Night* so painlessly" (1976, 58). Bad films about racism still reveal multiple truths about a people; its failures will be instructive.

My proposal is that *In the Heat of the Night* pictures American racism as a special event: contained, spectacular, inexplicable, and finally surmountable. This picture can be developed from Baldwin's

discussion of the framing of the film, the perfunctory near-lynching scene, and the final exchange between Tibbs and Gillespie.

Tibbs is introduced on his way out: he is first seen at a train station waiting to travel back to Philadelphia. He is detained in the Mississippi town for the course of the film, but in the end is finally able to take his leave, a departure that was essentially predestined. This framework immediately pictures the racism that is the film's subject as spatially and geographically quarantined. Tibbs's northward trajectory invokes a wider world, one that remains remote from the horrors of the South and always available as an exit:

Mr. Virgil Tibbs comes from freedom-loving Philadelphia ... to this haven, he will return, if he lives. But we know that he *will* live. The star of a film is rarely put to death, and certainly not *this* star, and certainly not in this film. (1976, 53)

Baldwin thus links the absence of genuine narrative tension with the film's spatial containment of racism: by guaranteeing Tibbs's/Poitier's safe return to the North from the start, the film encloses racism in the South. And because, narratively, the racist threat to Tibbs is never real (we know he will live), the film thereby presents American racism as equally unreal, as already transcended, as proved by the fact of "Philadelphia."

For Baldwin, the film lacks not only narrative tension but also coherence; he describes the film as a series of disjointed scenes hung together on a convoluted plot. The plot functions primarily as an opportunity for "titillating" depictions of racism and racial violence, which are either morally invigorating (when a racist is somehow rebuffed) or morally appalling (when Tibbs is momentarily threatened or insulted). In the penultimate scene—"the *exciting* scene," as Baldwin puts it (1976, 57, emphasis mine)—a mob of feverish white people surrounds Tibbs, acting out an iconic and therefore (for white audiences) satisfying picture of what racism is, of how it looks: crazed,

hideous, spectacular, and finally something so explosive that it must, of necessity, come to an end. Its horror is as exhilarating as it is familiar, designed to elicit the satisfying response of “pious horror and gratified reassurance” yet “without in the least involving or intimidating the spectator” (1976, 114). The spectators remain uninvolved because the spectacle is immediately legible and essentially *for them*. Its total transparency and lack of interiority or mystery mean that it requires no imagination or reflection, no work on the audience’s part (though of course Baldwin’s analysis demonstrates that its very transparency calls for the work of criticism). Thus, the more spectacular the racial violence, the more effectively it is isolated from the rest of reality (including the spectator); and the more isolated it is, the less genuinely real.

In the final scene, Gillespie walks Tibbs to the train station, the white man carrying the Black man’s bag. As Tibbs boards the train, Gillespie turns around and calls his name. Gillespie looks at Tibbs with pleading eyes, and then says, “You take care, you hear?” Tibbs looks back for a few beats, and breaks out with a gracious smile and says “yeah,” to which Gillespie smiles back, even bigger. Baldwin, ingeniously, describes this as the film’s “obligatory fade-out kiss,” which “in the classic American film, did not really speak of love, and, still less, of sex: it spoke of reconciliation, of all things now becoming possible” (1976, 58). The film thus ends with an unspoken but definite reconciliation, without blame, apology, or forgiveness but instead a shared and smiling understanding that such work is already done.

In these specific ways, *In the Heat of the Night* pictures American racism as a spatially, temporally, visually, and morally contained special event. Paradoxically, its very specialness and spectacularism render the event wholly familiar and unthreatening. This strategy functions to quarantine and contain American racism, presenting it as an exceptional event within some wider world, but crucially, it is emphatically *not* genuinely *part of* the world itself. Through these strategies, the film avoids (and facilitates the audience’s avoidance of) the reality of American racism as American reality. And crucially—

and, I hope, obviously—this strategy is not unique to this film but is rather a staple of American filmmaking.<sup>2</sup>

In the same year as this film's release, Martin Luther King Jr. writes: "it is necessary to refute the idea that the dominant ideology in our country even today is freedom and equality while racism is just an occasional departure from the norm on the part of a few bigoted extremists" (1967, 73, 88). What must be rejected, according to King, is a conception of racism as exceptional, hence not in any meaningful sense part of America's ordinary, functional reality. According to the dominant ideology, freedom and equality are the norm in both the normative ideal and the empirical sense: racism is regarded as both a deviation from America's governing ideals and statistically rare. McCarthy refers to this as America's "master narrative" (2002, 766), and "versions of it have been disseminated in every generation and to every new wave of immigrants—through schooling, citizenship requirements, public celebrations, museums and memorials, the mass media and just about every other vehicle of popular culture" (766).

As should be clear, films that picture racism as a special event consolidate this ideology. While such films purport to face and condemn racism, they facilitate avoidance by presenting racism as an unusual departure from a wider reality that remains morally intact. This is the wish that such films reveal. Recall that "the danger in the minds of most white Americans is the loss of their identity. Any upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one's sense of one's own reality" (Baldwin 1963, 294). Because acknowledgment of the reality of racism would involve just such an upheaval, the temptation will be to skip the work of acknowledgment and assume the position of moral censure and denunciation, which insists on distance and moral difference from that reality. An easily legible, isolated moral horror can be easily condemned. Films that picture racism as a special event make precisely this move. As Baldwin writes in "Mass Culture and the Creative Artist," "these movies are designed not to trouble, but to reassure; they do not reflect reality, they merely

rearrange its elements into something we can bear. They *weaken* our ability to deal with the world as it is, ourselves as we are” (1960, 375).

But now the question is: What would it look like for a film to acknowledge racism *as reality*? Can film picture racism not as a special event but as a pervasive, structural, material reality, as integrated into the broader world? And can a film picture the pervasive reality of racism without suggesting its permanence or inevitability? Can film picture racism as a reality that could be resisted? There is no one way that a film must do this; whether any film constitutes a form of acknowledgment would need to be argued through close analysis of its narrative and form. I’ll now argue that *Nothing But a Man* should be understood as an exemplar of film-as-acknowledgment. I focus on how the film renders the social and material world, as well as its emphasis on the characters’ interiority and resistance to that world.

*NOTHING BUT A MAN* IS A 1964 INDEPENDENT FEATURE FILM DIRECTED BY Michael Roemer, who coauthored the screenplay with Robert Young.<sup>3</sup> Roemer and Young previously worked on documentaries on civil rights activism, on the Angolan uprising of 1961, and on the slums of Palermo (the latter was commissioned by NBC but never broadcast, deemed too powerful for the American public). Both Roemer and Young connected their interest in making *Nothing But a Man* with their own experiences of anti-Semitism<sup>4</sup> (Roemer fled Berlin in 1939 when he was 11). To write the script, they traveled the Southern states for eight weeks, meeting with and interviewing activists working with the Congress of Racial Equity, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. While the film is set in an unnamed town near Birmingham, Alabama, most scenes were shot in New Jersey, as shooting with an all-Black cast in the South was deemed too dangerous. The film had trouble finding funding for both production and distribution, and once it did, none of the large movie theaters wanted to show it. It was one of Malcolm X’s favorite films. In 1993, *Nothing But a Man* was named to the National Film Registry at the Library of Congress, which selects

films for preservation for being “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant.” (*In the Heat of the Night* was named in 2002.) *Nothing But a Man* was thus threatened at every stage of its development and only belatedly recognized. This is not as a lapse or accident but part of America’s history of concerted and institutionally supported practices of avoidance and denial. Thus the life of this film is caught up with the world that it shows, with our real world folded into the film’s own history.

*Nothing But a Man* opens first with the sounds and then with documentary-style, black-and-white images of a jackhammer blasting on a train track. The shot is low to the ground between someone’s feet, with the lines of the track continuing into the horizon, where a group of men work further along. The next shot is a close-up of the protagonist, Duff (Ivan Dixon), followed by more and varied shots of Black men working on the track, surrounded by trees. These Black figures are literally at work constructing America itself. The film’s first shots are thus emphatically material, with the camera riveted to bodies, machines, and earth, all contributing to a sense of both the film and its characters as rooted in this world.

*Nothing But a Man*—shot with a neorealist aesthetic and Motown music—follows Duff, a railroad section hand, who meets Josie (singer Abbey Lincoln, in her first starring role), an avowedly committed schoolteacher and the reverend’s daughter, while his crew is stopped for a few weeks working outside her small town. The first half of the film follows their courtship, along with Duff’s uneasy relationship with both Josie’s father and his own (in Birmingham). Josie’s father (Stanley Green), working in accommodationist collaboration with the white people in town, disapproves of Duff, first because of his job and then because of his anti-accommodationist commitments. Duff’s father, Will (Julius Harris), handicapped by a work accident, is aggressive and alcoholic. The second half of the film follows the first months of Duff and Josie’s marriage, as Duff leaves the transient work of the section gang and tries to find local work after being blacklisted for starting “trouble” at the mill (trying to form some kind of union

amongst the Black workers). Duff briefly leaves Josie in a moment of agonized frustration and anger, which he misdirects at her, before finally returning from Birmingham with his young son from another relationship. The film ends with a close shot of Duff's and Josie's faces as they embrace, and Duff telling her, "it ain't gonna be easy, but it's gonna be alright. Baby, I feel so free inside."

In what follows I demonstrate the specific ways the film works to picture racism as a pervasive, material, structural reality. It does so by emphasizing the material world of the characters, and by emphasizing the characters' interiority. By emphasizing both the materiality of the world and the inwardness of the characters, *Nothing But a Man* pictures a genuinely human reality—a reality that is lived and that lives in its inhabitants—rather than a spectacle. I show how both the film's and the main characters' reticence are its way of acknowledging the separateness and non-transparency of what it shows, where this very reticence is also what implicates the viewer, calling for her more active engagement.

Early in the film, Duff and Josie are out on their first date. After going dancing, they drive to a quiet spot and talk about work: Josie observes that Duff must be "kinda cut off" since he can't stay in one place very long. Duff says it keeps him out of "trouble," a word that recurs throughout the script, typically referring to his racial resistance. (Late in the film he even commits to it as a way of life: "I guess I'll make some trouble in town.") Their conversation in the car is shot in intimate close-up, their faces illuminated against a blacked-out background (figure 1); as Terri Francis writes of the scene, "the face is the landscape, the world writ small" (2015, 101).

Behind Josie's head, there is a bullet hole in the car window, an unremarked-upon sign of Duff's "troubles" (the world, again, writ small). After Duff kisses her and they have an extremely charming back and forth about how many times Josie's been kissed ("not counting tonight?" she jokes drily, "must be about 28 times"), a white hand reaches over the window in the upper left corner of the shot, right behind her head, right beside the bullet hole. The otherwise static cam-



**Figure 1.** Josie and Duff in Duff's car



**Figure 2.** Josie and Duff being harassed

era then pans up from Josie's face to a young white man staring and grinning while an off-screen voice asks if they're "doing anything" before joining his friend.

As Francis writes in her careful analysis, "the scene exemplifies the intensely personal registers of racial conflict. Duff and Josie's relationship is exposed in ways that they can neither prevent nor regulate" (2015, 105). The white men disrupt Josie and Duff's privacy (figure 2), and their arrival is marked by a cinematographic shift: while previously Duff and Josie had commanded the camera's observant, motionless attention, with the rest of the world obscured, here the camera's movement away from Josie and up to the white figure activates that off-screen space to indicate the wider world surrounding the couple. With this small pivot, their privacy is revealed to be precarious and surveilled, and the off-screen space and wider world are revealed to be not neutral but specific: racialized and threatening.

In the next scene, as they drive through the dark town, Duff asks Josie why she stays. She stays so she can be a decent teacher in the segregated school. She says the town is better than it used to be: "eight years ago they still had a lynching here. Tied a man to a car and dragged him to death." Josie and Duff's plain conversation here invokes the most iconic image of American racial violence, her "still" functioning to bind her town's recent history to an even longer past.

As with the bullet hole, explosive racial violence is not shown but referenced. The bullet hole and Josie's memory function to situate the racial violence at one and the same time in the world *and* in the characters' specific experiences, as lodged in their lives (even if indirectly<sup>5</sup>). The lynching is not directly shown, not presented as a legible, iconic, overdetermined spectacle. Rather, it is cited and voiced as a memory that one character shares with another. Whereas the meaning and significance of a horrific spectacle are assumed to be transparent, here Josie's unemotional delivery and the brevity of her description generate a sense of privacy and opacity. The lynching is not transparently significant or *for us*; it is rather *her* memory, and she does not elaborate. At the same time, the casualness of their conver-

sation communicates some kind of unspoken understanding. In this way, while the use of memory and citation presents racial violence as something that is lived and lived with, this memory is not wholly individualized but voiced as of a world and a past that they share.

On the use of scenes of visceral racial violence, Baldwin writes: “one need not, indeed, search for examples so historic or so gaudy; this is a warfare waged daily in the heart” (1955, 15). *Nothing But a Man*’s primary concern is this daily intimate warfare, and it pictures this by weaving racial violence into an ordinary night out and into the materiality of their ordinary world, as something the characters navigate, resist, and remember. The point here is not that in order to picture racism as a reality, a film must refrain from depicting any extreme or even iconic violence. The point is that such violence must be integrated and earned, and must resist the mode of moralizing or titillating spectacle.<sup>6</sup>

*Nothing But a Man* attends to the ways racism and racial violence show up within, shape, and threaten intimate spheres and relationships,<sup>7</sup> and also how they show up at work, the other major site of ordinary life. We have seen that the film’s opening, orienting scene is of Black men at work in the material world. There are several other scenes of work, and several scenes of coworkers together in close interior spaces. The latter often involve composed shots of several faces and bodies, carefully organized to crowd out of the boxy cramped frame (a 1.33:1 aspect ratio). These scenes and shots present the solitary and reserved Duff as nevertheless lodged within a specific and close community.

When Duff and Josie decide to get married, Duff must give up the transient but well-paying work of the section gang and get a job in town. He takes a job at the mill but leaves after word gets to his boss that he has proposed that the Black workers think about “getting together.” He then finds it difficult to get decent work because his name has been put on an anti-union blacklist. The film shows Duff driving through the town’s public spaces, and through different, specific places of possible employment. The repetition, mobility,

and physicality of these scenes effectively foreground what Tommy Curry calls the *materiality* of racism (2011, 129), situating racism in the world itself rather than in acute racist interactions.<sup>8</sup> Foregrounding economic intimidation and threats to employment arguably presents a more historically accurate picture of the dominant form of midcentury racism and racial violence, and yet my primary point here is to argue that as a narrative and visual strategy, the intertwining of racism with the everydayness of work effectively pictures racism as materially real, as entrenched and pervasive, rather than as extraordinary and individualized.<sup>9</sup> What the film shows is not exceptional, but life.

Of course, an analysis of how *Nothing But a Man* pictures race would be incomplete without an analysis of how the film pictures its intersection with class (see Martin and Muhammad 2015; Smith 2015). From the opening shot Duff is identified with manual labor, he is frequently placed in shots with other men on the section gang (either in cramped quarters or working outdoors), and he later makes explicit his commitment to unionized labor (this all in contrast to Josie, who we learn almost immediately has been to college). Clearly, this emphatic identification of Duff with his work, which in turn identifies him with the materiality of the world, is central to the film's presentation of the materiality of racism, though I am not able to explore this important aspect of the film here.<sup>10</sup>

I have tried to show some of the ways *Nothing But a Man* pictures racism as total structure. When trying to keep focus on racism as structure or a system, rather than a matter of individual psychology or morality, it might seem that we must turn attention away from the intimate and the personal and towards institutions, as though these were mutually exclusive objects of attention; thus it might seem that we would lose contact with the individual in his or her specificity. Baldwin himself sometimes suggests as much. In *Devil*, Baldwin criticizes American films for reducing Black characters to their position within society and thereby denying them "privacy." He notes that white characters (especially "white chicks") are not defined by their

society but rather more by their personal lives and loves (“society is out of it, beneath her”). By contrast,

the private life of a black woman, to say nothing of the private life of a black man, cannot really be considered at all.... The situation of the black heroine, to say nothing of the black hero, must always be left at society’s mercy: in order to justify white history and in order to indicate the essential validity of the black condition. (1976, 117)

Baldwin is concerned about films that submerge a character in a social role, such that she or he is *all* role, in a way that functions to normalize the character’s oppressed condition and reduce her to it. This seems actually to be an acute risk for films that seek to present racism as systemic, world-constituting reality; the risk is that such a film might naturalize, picture as inevitable, what is in fact a historically specific, contingent, and changeable reality. But there is a difference between a work that reduces a character to their social position in a way that asserts the inevitability of the latter, and a work that presents a character as living in a definite, oppressive social world and as inhabiting a complex position in a definite and personal way. In the latter case, the presentation of a character’s engagement with the world is a way of maintaining both the link between the social and the personal without losing the latter, and the productive tension of a divided aesthetic attention.<sup>11</sup>

*Nothing But a Man* preserves Josie and Duff’s privacy, thanks both to the intimate cinematography and to the performances of Dixon and Lincoln. Abbey Lincoln performs Josie as forthright but not transparent. She often pauses before speaking or looks to the side, and she is amused when Duff reveals his preconceptions of her as “the preacher’s daughter.” But *Nothing But a Man* is Dixon’s film. Dixon’s performance is reserved and internal; he plays Duff as someone who holds himself way back and inside, and yet this guarded performance radiates with learned caution, rage, fear, yearning, love, and

occasionally bemused skepticism. What I want to suggest is that this character's manifest interiority is one of the film's essential strategies of acknowledgment and for calling for acknowledgment and involvement on the part of the viewer.

The film gives itself totally to Duff's privacy in two tracking shots of Duff walking down a street at night, once in town and once in Birmingham. In both instances, the camera stays to his side and follows the pace he sets as the world fills the soundscape: car horns, sirens, bar music, church music, his own footsteps. Duff is wholly inward, completely preoccupied by his own thoughts, and yet by foregrounding the surrounding sounds, the film suggests that he is not withdrawing from the world but reflecting on it and on how to live in it. It suggests that his apparent withdrawal, narrativized through his transient work and initial trepidation about marriage, is his specific strategy for living in it; the question of whether he can finally survive through this strategy is the question of the film. The tracking shots affirm Duff's inwardness and separateness, and let us see *that* he is thinking but not *what* he is thinking. Attending to his thoughtfulness while maintaining the camera's distance, hence without disclosure or resolution, is one way the film allows its very form to be implicated in what it shows, as though the camera's watchful movement and were called for by Duff's carefully protected inwardness.

By picturing the characters in postures of active reflection and inwardness within a specific racist environment, *Nothing But a Man* pictures a structural, institutional, material reality—a human world—but it pictures this reality as cognized, felt, and resisted—that is, as lived. Whereas a spectacle is wholly for its observer, all externality and obvious in its intended significance, a film that aims to picture a genuine human reality must do so in a way that maintains its interiority and opacity: we are present to it but it is not wholly for us.<sup>12</sup> Recall that for Baldwin, a gaudy spectacle dictates a ready understanding of and moral response to the events shown and thereby fails to genuinely involve the viewer. By contrast, *Nothing But a Man's* formal and narrative reticence and the reservation and opacity of the

characters are how it manages to function as a kind of acknowledgment. This reticence means that the film does not do all the work but rather calls on the viewer for a more thoughtful mode of imaginative engagement, implicating the viewer in what she's watching.

These are some of the ways *Nothing But a Man* constitutes an acknowledgment of American racism as a lived reality rather than just a more historically accurate presentation of it (more "knowledge"). The film does not simply present and the audience does not merely learn some new set of facts. Rather, as I have been emphasizing, what is pictured, what the audience experiences, is a material and human reality, at once structural and personal. The film's narrative and formal specificities constitute its concrete strategies of acknowledgment.<sup>13</sup>

REFLECTING ON THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE UNITED STATES TO ACKNOWLEDGE its past, two absences are striking: as of 2020, there is no national memorial to those it enslaved or to those oppressed by Jim Crow laws and practices, and the federal government has never offered a formal apology for these state-sponsored, nation-building institutions.<sup>14</sup> One explanation for this absence is that there is still insufficient public acknowledgment of these wrongs as institutions and practices—forms of life—that define America's history and present.<sup>15</sup> An apology offered in the absence of such acknowledgment would either not receive the requisite public support (a 2019 poll shows only 35 percent of whites support a governmental apology), or would read as precisely a one-off special event, that is, as a dis-integrated and empty spectacle. As Roy L. Brooks argues, something must "transform the rhetoric of apology into a meaningful, material reality" (2019, 155).

One way to do this, Brooks proposes, is through reparations, which "solidify" public apology and "make apologies believable" (142). Additionally, an apology can—I would argue, must—be realized, made real, only when integrated into a larger set of social, cultural, and material practices of acknowledgment. As just one part of such a larger set, an official apology might lose its veneer of singular, quasi-magical importance, but as grounded in such practices, it would thereby gain in genuine *reality*.

In this context, film can function to further clarify the nature of the wrong and make vivid what it is that the apology is for. Films can also acknowledge the extremely subtle, lived dimensions of the wrong that could not possibly be addressed by an official apology. Or, by picturing the reality of American racism as America's reality, where racism is one of the principal facts of American life, a film might also reveal the profound difficulty of offering an apology for American racism. What would it mean to apologize for a reality?

I finished drafting this essay in June 2020, as Black Lives Matter demonstrations erupted in response to the police murders of George Floyd in Minneapolis and Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky—protests against police violence met with police violence in response. Accompanying the protests was a daily public discourse on racism in policing and the possibility of police abolition. At the same time, voices warned against the temptation to focus critical attention exclusively on police violence. In an essay for the *New Yorker* called “How Do We Change America?” Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2020) writes of “the importance of expanding our national discussion about what ails the country beyond the racism and brutality of the police.” Otherwise, she continues, “we risk reducing racism to the outrageous and intentional acts of depraved individuals.”

This specific reduction, this absorption by the outrageous, constitutes a formal, political, ethical, and aesthetic strategy of attention, providing an entrenched, collective way of picturing the world. Taylor's point, of course, is not that we should not focus on police brutality but that we must be cautious about the ways in which such violence can capture our attention and constrain our political imagination. Film, I've argued, is a medium that can either re-deploy this reductive strategy or engage its capacities to resist the temptation. I have tried to analyze some of the ways in which outrageous spectacle functions in film, and I have indicated some of film's possibilities for resisting that temptation in the service of a more expansive and therefore more adequate acknowledgment of reality.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the following people for their rich and helpful conversations and responses: Zed Adams, Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste, Matthew Congdon, Richard Eldridge, Robert Gooding-Williams, Rafeeq Hasan, Richard Moran, Daniel Rodriguez-Navas, Alex Wolfson, and Vida Yao.

## NOTES

1. Given his emphasis on racism's power to shape our basic sense of self and world, and his concern to de-emphasize individuals' beliefs and feelings, it is fruitful to read Baldwin in relation to contemporary philosophers arguing for an ideological conception of racism. See especially Gooding-Williams (forthcoming), Haslanger (2017), Mills (2017).
2. This is an empirical claim, and so I leave it to the reader to consult American films "about" racism to see whether they execute this strategy, either in whole or in part. In 2020, at the height of the Black Lives Matter uprising and at the time of writing this essay, director Kasi Lemmons wrote a piece for the *Washington Post* titled "White Americans, your lack of imagination is killing us," making a similar observation. She writes: "You're addicted to the pornography of our pain. When I made my first movie, "Eve's Bayou," I got questions about why I didn't include incidents of white racism in a movie about a Creole family ... Twenty-two years later, some critics said that the racist violence in "Harriet," my film about Harriet Tubman, wasn't vicious enough. Apparently, they couldn't understand that I wanted to tell a story about a black woman's triumph, rather than make a movie that reveled in pain and degradation. I wondered why they craved seeing black bodies get beaten. If you see us only when we're ... victims who satisfy your taste for violence or death, then you don't see us as fully human" (2020).
3. The one book dedicated to this film is the indispensable *The Politics and Poetics of Black Film: Nothing But a Man* (Martin and Muhammad 2015), an edited collection that provides scholarship, primary resources (including the screenplay and press kit), and statements by the film-

- makers. This was my resource for most of the empirical details I cite regarding production and distribution.
4. Roemer would later claim that he would not make the film now, as a white director. “In those days we had the gumption to think we could identify with blacks” (quoted in Smith 2015). I cannot here address the difficult questions concerning the relationship between the racial and social position of artists and the racial and social content of the work they create. It is important to note that the preproduction and production of *Nothing But a Man* was extremely collaborative, which is not to say it was without conflict (see Martin and Wall 2015).
  5. Richard Wright describes this indirectness: “the things that influenced my conduct as a Negro did not have to happen to me directly; I needed but to hear of them to feel their full effects in the deepest layers of my consciousness. Indeed the white brutality that I had not seen was a more effective control of my behavior than that which I knew. The actual experience would have let me see the realistic outlines of what was really happening, but as long as it remained something terrible and yet remote, something whose horror and blood might descend upon me at any moment, I was compelled to give my entire imagination over to it” (Wright [1937] 1945, 150–51, quoted in Wood 2018, 759).
  6. To consider two popular examples: the police murder of Radio Raheem (Bill Nunn) at the end of Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing* (1989) is an example of explosive, iconic violence that is integrated and earned, hence pictured as part of reality rather than as marginal (see also Mitchell 1990 on the film’s deployment of violence). I would argue that *12 Years a Slave* (2013) is a mixed case, and that the extended scene of Topsy (Lupita Nyong-o) being whipped resorts to racism-as-spectacle. Thanks to Rafeeq Hasan for raising this question.
  7. In this paper I cannot even begin to discuss the significance of Duff’s relationships with his own father and Josie’s father.
  8. As the hosts of the podcast *The Micheaux Mission*, Vincent Williams and Len Webb note: “if there had been an inciting incident, then that person would be the focus of his and our anger. But without it, the violence becomes genuinely structural” (2017).

9. In their dialogue about the film, Michael T. Martin and David Wall (2015) critique it on various points: for instance, for its potentially conservative gender and family politics, for its depiction of the Black church as depoliticized, and for the absence of any overt activism or mention of the Civil Rights Movement. My aim is not to deny or contest any of this, or to assert that the film is wholly politically adequate. My central focus is on *how* the film tells the kind of story it does, and how it pictures American racism.
10. It would be fruitful to analyze filmic and narrative strategies for emphasizing the materiality of racism in different class contexts. One example would be Douglas Sirk's melodrama *Imitation of Life* (1959), which pictures and inhabits the perspective and self-conception of white femininity as a kind of dazzling theater of exalted and self-absorbed self-deception. Of course the character of Annie works as a housekeeper, and is thus identified with a working class position. But my thought is that one of the film's central concerns is the way Lora's increasingly extravagant form of life locks her into a kind of racialized blindness, and that the film depicts this in part through the excesses of the material world she builds around her.
11. On the difficulty of achieving and maintaining this attention, Cavell writes: "in a world in which it is common to rest assured that a given problem is either neurotic or existential, psychological or political, few works are sufficiently autonomous to testify that the relation between self and community (because they are composed of one another) is an undying dialectic" (1971, 138).
12. This idea that film acknowledges our separateness from the world that it shows is a major thesis of Cavell's work on the ontology of film and photography: "photography maintains the presentness of the world by accepting our absence from it. The reality of a photograph is present to me while I am not present to it" (1971, 23, and *passim*).
13. A fuller exploration of this idea that film can acknowledge racism as a structural reality would involve demonstrating how this task can be realized in different genres and kinds of films. It is not at all the case that reality can only be acknowledged via a realist aesthetic. As

mentioned earlier (note 10), Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959) presents the perspective of white femininity as self-absorbed self-deception. Donald Glover's television series *Atlanta* (2016–present) engages uncanny and surreal aesthetic strategies to explore the bizarre, self-contradictory, fantastical, and alienating qualities of American racism.

14. The Equal Justice Initiative has been working for the past several years on memorials to lynching victims and has recently opened The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, which was funded by private donations and charitable foundations. Starting in 2007 with Virginia, several states have apologized for slavery and Jim Crow, and resolutions have passed in both the House of Representatives (2008) and the Senate (2009); these typically include disclaimers in order to avoid commitment to or responsibility for reparations.
15. Another explanation is that a formal apology would invite demands for reparations, demands the American government is unwilling to seriously address.

## REFERENCES

- Baldwin, James. [1955] 1998. "Everybody's Protest Novel." *Notes of a Native Son. Collected Essays*. Library of America.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1960. "Mass Culture and the Creative Artist" *Daedalus*. 89 (2), 373–76.
- \_\_\_\_\_. [1961] 1989. "Nobody Knows My Name." In *Nobody Knows My Name*. First Vintage International.
- \_\_\_\_\_. [1962] 1998. "As Much Truth as One Can Bear." In *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, edited by Randall Kenan. New York: Pantheon Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. [1963] 1998. *Fire Next Time, Collected Essays*. Library of America.
- \_\_\_\_\_. [1965] 1998. "White Man's Guilt." *Collected Essays*. Library of America.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1971. "An Open Letter to My Sister, Miss Angela Davis." *New York Review of Books*. Jan. 7.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1976. *The Devil Finds Work*. Vintage International.

- \_\_\_\_\_. [1984] 2010. "On Being White ... And Other Lies." In *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, edited by Randall Kenan. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Brooks, Roy L. 2019. *Atonement and Forgiveness: A New Model for Black Reparations*. U. California Press.
- Cavell, Stanley. [1971] 1979. *The World Viewed*. Harvard U. Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002a. "Knowing and Acknowledging." *Must We Mean What We Say?* Cambridge U. Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002b. "The Avoidance of Love." *Must We Mean What We Say?* Cambridge U. Press.
- Corntassel, Jeff, and Cindy Holder. 2008. "Who's Sorry Now? Government Apologies, Truth Commissions, and Indigenous Self-Determination in Australia, Canada, Guatemala, and Peru." *Human Rights Review* 9: 465–89.
- Curry, Tommy J. 2011. "The Political Economy of Reparations: An Anti-Ethical Consideration of Atonement and Racial Reconciliation Under Colonial Moralism." *Race, Gender, and Class* 18 (1/2): 125–46.
- Danto, Arthur C. 1985. "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial" *The Nation* 241.
- Francis, Terri. 2015. "Can't Stay, Can't Go: What Is History to a Cinematic Imagination?" In *The Politics and Poetics of Black Film: Nothing But a Man*," edited by Michael T. Martin and David C. Wall. Bloomington: Indiana U. Press.
- Frank, J. 2014. "James Baldwin's 'Everybody's Protest Novel': Educating Our Responses to Racism." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 46(1), 24–31.
- Gooding-Williams, Robert. "Ideology, Social Practices, Anti-Black Concepts" (unpublished, forthcoming).
- Govier, Trudy. 1999. "What Is Acknowledgment and Why Is It Important?" OSSA Conference Archive. 1. <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive/OSSA3/keynotes/1>.
- Jurgen Habermas. 2001. "On the Public Use of History," in *The Postnational Constellation*, MIT Press.
- Haslanger, Sally. 2017. "Racism, Ideology, and Social Movements." *Res Philosophica*, Vol. 94, No. 1.
- King Jr., Martin Luther. [1967] 2010. *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* Beacon Press.

- Lemmons, Kasi. 2020. "White Americans, your lack of imagination is killing us." *Washington Post*. [www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/06/01/white-americans-your-lack-imagination-is-killing-us/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/06/01/white-americans-your-lack-imagination-is-killing-us/).
- Martin, Michael T., and Khalil Muhammad. 2015. "History and Possibility in *Nothing But a Man*." In *The Politics and Poetics of Black Film: Nothing But a Man*, edited by Michael T. Martin and David C. Wall. Bloomington: Indiana U. Press.
- Martin, Michael T., and David C. Wall, eds. 2015. *The Politics and Poetics of Black Film: Nothing But a Man*. Bloomington: Indiana U. Press.
- McCarthy, Thomas. 2002. "Vergangenheitsbewältigung in the USA: On the Politics of the Memory of Slavery." *Political Theory* 30 (5): 623–48.
- Mills, Charles. 1999. *The Racial Contract*. Cornell U. Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2017. "Ideology." In *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*. Edited by Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Mitchell, W. J. T. 1990. "The Violence of Public Art: "Do the Right Thing." *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (4), 880–99.
- Radzick, Linda. 2004. "Making Amends." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 41 (2): 141–54.
- Smith, Judith E. 2015. "Civil Rights, Labor, and Sexual Politics on Screen in *Nothing But a Man*." In *The Politics and Poetics of Black Film: Nothing But a Man*, edited by Michael T. Martin and David C. Wall. Bloomington: Indiana U. Press.
- Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahтта. 2020. "How Do We Change America?" *The New Yorker*. June 8.
- Walker, Margaret Urban. 2006. *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing*. Cambridge U. Press.
- Williams, Vincent, and Len Webb. 2017. *The Micheaux Mission Podcast*. March 27. [www.micheauxmission.com/micheauxmission/2017/3/28/62-nothing-but-a-man-1964?rq=nothing%20but%20a%20man](http://www.micheauxmission.com/micheauxmission/2017/3/28/62-nothing-but-a-man-1964?rq=nothing%20but%20a%20man).
- Wood, Amy Louise. 2018. "The Spectacle of Lynching: Rituals of White Supremacy in the Jim Crow South." *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 77 (3-4): 757–88.

